

Henry the Immigrant

The First Tapscotts of Virginia

Robert E. Tapscott



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The Glenn and Mary Imle Tapscott Family
The Never Failing Brook, 2004

For now, with glad'ned eyes, we view the bounds
Of that fam'd colony, from whence the weed,
The salutiferous plant, that sends the breast
From noxious vapours of th' inclement morn,
Provocative to solid, studious tho't,
Derives its birth and use; the land that erst
Employ'd the labours of our virgin queen
And still is sacred to Eliza's fame.

“Observations in Several Voyages and Travels in America
in the Year 1736,” *The London Magazine*, July 1746

Dedicated to Joseph D. (“Danny”) Tapscott, Kilmarnock,
Virginia, who captained our voyage of discovery.

In memory of Victoria Angela Maria Pytell Tapscott.

For Corina Rachel Tapscott and Cody Austin Tapscott,
GGGGGGGG Grandchildren of Henry & Ann Tapscott
of Lancaster and Northumberland Counties, Virginia.

Illustrations

Except where noted otherwise, all photographs and maps are by the author, and all drawings are from Clipart.com.



Flowering tobacco in the Northern Neck of Virginia (George Washington's Birthplace, Westmoreland County).

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Foreword

Henry the Immigrant is neither a genealogy—though it contains much of interest to genealogists—nor a family history, as the term is normally used. Rather, it is the story of a family, a quite remarkable family that lived in a quite remarkable time. Like all accounts, verity suffers when the perspective is that of one person, particularly when that person has a familial bond. Nevertheless, imperfect as it may be, this is the story of Henry and Ann Tapscott, their offspring, and the society in which they lived, with every attempt to replace wishful thinking with fact, and dubious anecdote with record. The story details the lives of Henry, Ann, and their children, with short (and oftentimes not so short) biographies of their grandchildren, and continues with Ann's second marriage to Benjamin George and their offspring. The story is chiefly set in 18th-century Virginia, but numerous excursions into the more distant past and toward the present are made to put things into perspective and to provide glimpses of sources and outcomes. In particular, brief overviews of some of the descendants of the many grandchildren are provided. One of those lines, that of Henry of Caswell, is the subject of a book in progress.

This book arose during research on the Tapscotts of Clark County, Illinois, where my immediate family originated. Dad died young, and Mom, child of a German immigrant, was the primary, but less than reliable, source for our limited Tapscott lore. She claimed the American Tapscotts were poor (mostly untrue), but were “good and kindly masters” of their slaves (questionable). The slave part was intriguing. My forebears were slaveholders?

The work of others showed that the progenitors of the principal Tapscott line in America, Henry and Ann, had lived in Colonial Virginia, but little was known of their lives, and even less of their beginnings. Devon, Wales, Scotland, and even Ireland were proposed for Henry's source. From ancillary research, I became increasingly convinced that the Tapscotts originated in and around Exmoor near the Somerset/Devon border. Villages in this area had 16th-century Tapscotts, a characteristic shared with no other region in Britain.

In the Autumn of 2002, to get a feel for our origins, my wife, Mary Frances, and I made a two-week trip to the Exmoor region—a large, rural, and isolated area of moor, forest, and farm. We stayed at a farmhouse inn on the outskirts of Selworthy, a Somerset hamlet of perhaps thirty souls and ten or so houses, most of them medieval, though extensively remodeled in the 1800s. A mile walk to the west was Allerford, a metropolis of fifty houses, or so it was claimed, though outlying farmhouses must have been included, and another mile led to Porlock, large enough to have two pubs and several restaurants, but no bank or ATM. Three miles in the other direction was Minehead, a sizeable town of 10,000, doubling in tourist season. Over a gorse-covered steep hill to the north of the inn, an hour's climb allowed a view of Bristol Channel. To the south was the heart of Exmoor, which lies in both Devon and Somerset, though mainly in the latter.

Selworthy looked exactly like the rural English hamlet one imagines as a child when reading Beatrix Potter or A. A. Milne—yellow, thatched-roof cottages, resembling Hobbit dwellings, surrounded by flower gardens and surmounted by large round chimneys. On the lawns were

squirrels and pheasants, and the encircling grassy fields pastured sheep and horses. A hundred yards or so from our inn was a 14th-century tithe barn, and a few hundred yards further was the Church of All Saints, dating from the 15th century. At this parish church, Tapscotts were baptized, wed, and buried, starting at least as early as 1572 (the parish records only go to 1571). It is in Selworthy that we find some of the earliest Tapscotts recorded.

I wish I could say that we found numerous stones and monuments with Tapscott names, but we did not, except at Minehead, where Tapscott markers in the St. Michaels Parish churchyard date from the late 1700s. The fact is that the Tapscotts originated more than 4½ centuries ago and most cemetery markers (assuming that they could have been afforded) do not last that long, or at least become totally unreadable. At the Somerset Studies Library, in Taunton, with the help of librarian David Bromwich, and from other sources, we did, however, find written records (or transcriptions) of Tapscotts who flourished around Exmoor in the 1500s, 1600s, and 1700s. The name then starts fading, particularly after 1850 or so, until today only three Tapscott households are found in all of Somerset and only fifty-eight, in all of England (based on phone listings).

The zenith of our journey was the experience of attending services in churches where some of the earliest Tapscotts worshipped, seeing still-used baptismal fonts in which they were baptized, and walking village streets they had trod.

Starting with the results of this trip, I had originally planned to write a book specifically on the Tapscotts of England's West Country. Discoveries from another expedition, however, caused a revision of those plans. In 2004, Mary Frances and I traveled to the Northern Neck of Virginia, where Henry the Immigrant landed and founded our Tapscott line. Like much of Somerset and Devon, the Northern Neck is rural with widely separated settlements. Although the churches which Henry attended—Christ Church in Lancaster County and Wicomico Church in Northumberland County—have been rebuilt (Christ Church only a few years after Henry's death), chalices and patens used in those Anglican churches during Henry's time are still extant. I was moved taking communion from a chalice undoubtedly used by the first Henry at Wicomico Church. Mary Frances and I stayed at the Inn at Levelfields, an antebellum plantation house between the towns of Kilmarnock and Lancaster in Lancaster County, discovering only after being there several days that Henry's 266-acre farm had adjoined Levelfields Plantation and that James Tapscott, Henry's grandson, had actually owned part of the property.

Thanks to the research of others—in particular, Joseph D. ("Danny") Tapscott of Kilmarnock, Virginia—much of Henry's life was known, but much also remained in question, in particular his earliest years as an indentured servant, the origins of his wife Ann, his property (though Danny was making discoveries in this area when he died in 2003). The two-week trip to Virginia's Northern Neck, followed by another in 2005, however, proved enormously fruitful in revealing Henry and Ann's lives. In fact, the trips were so successful that I put on indefinite hold a book on the Tapscotts of England's West Country to write expressly about Henry, Ann, and their near descendants, incorporating some of the British material as background.

The book has two purposes—to document the lives of the first three generations of Tapscotts in America and the corresponding generations of Georges (starting with Benjamin, Ann's second husband) and to provide a starting point for others wishing to research family lines stemming from Ann's grandchildren. I wish I could say that the present work is without error. It certainly is not. No history can be error-free. But I did my best. I must make the statement required of all

authors (unfortunately, completely true here) that all errors are mine alone, and are not the fault of others, whose advice I often ignored. Numerous unknowns and uncertainties could have been cleared up with additional time spent on research; however, like many of those who read this book, I also have other family lines and histories to pursue. Historical research can become “Sisyphusian”—never ending and, eventually, without meaning. Recognizing this, I decided to end this after one year of intense research. Year’s end has arrived (and passed). I hope that others, with fresher viewpoints and clearer heads, will take up the task.

I owe much to those who did the early and really difficult job of unraveling Tapscotts—Patricia Baber, Bettina Burns, John Fox, June Leathers, James Kidd, Monica Sanowar, Noni Sawyer, Dennis Short, Lin Van Buren, and, of course, Danny Tapscott, among others. The success of the research trips to Virginia is due to many people. W. Preston Haynie, the long-time editor of *The Bulletin of the Northumberland County Historical Society*, led Mary Frances and I through the wills, deeds, court records, and maps housed in the Society’s library and in the adjoining courthouse; allowed us to review Danny Tapscott’s research materials; and has continued to provide information, suggestions, and motivation. It was primarily due to Preston and his request for an article for the *Bulletin*, that I decided to publish the present book as soon as possible. I must also thank Virginia Burgess, at the Northumberland Historical Society, for her invaluable help with paperwork. The staff of the Mary Ball Washington Museum Library went out of their way to locate written materials and records. It was through this library that I was introduced to Charlotte Henry, an expert on Alexander Swan and Fleets Bay Neck. Charlotte’s efforts at the Lancaster County Courthouse saved me many hours of work, and she provided the foundation for the story of Swan, Henry’s master during his early years in the Colonies. Charlotte also introduced me to other resource people. Ann Dorsey, an authority on land and mapping in and around Christ Church Parish, helped immensely in tying the various characters to real locales, at least as much as they can be tied in a region that employs metes and bounds, defining land by long-dead trees, renamed creeks, and no longer extant rocks. Robert Teagle, Education Director, provided valuable records during my brief research at the Foundation for Historic Christ Church Research Library. The staffs at the Library of Virginia in Richmond, the Virginia Historical Society in Richmond, and the Lancaster and Northumberland County courthouses supplied most of the records cited herein. Without the tremendous support of the County Clerks Offices, this book would never have been written. The Very Rev. Scott Dillard (himself, an historian) and his staff furnished information about Wicomico Church and allowed us to photograph the ancient paten and chalice still in use. The Rev. Scott A. West did the same for St. Mary’s White Chapel (sometimes, “Whitechapel”) Episcopal Church, where he is the rector. Frank Kizer, White Chapel’s historian, spent several hours relating the history of the church and gave a detailed and engrossing tour. Frank Schwartz interrupted his busy schedule to show Edgehill Plantation House on his Lancaster County farm and has continued to help with questions. I spent one delightful afternoon sitting on the front porch of the 1832 house at Windsor Farm, where, after showing me the cemetery with its beautiful stones marking the graves of some Tapscott descendants, Myrna Acors and her son Kendall served lemonade and discussed people associated with the farm and with the Lancaster Roller Mill. And, of course, I must acknowledge the massive work of my wife, Mary Frances, who spent many “vacation” hours in musty libraries, museums, and courthouses, taking notes and reading documents. As the

book was being finalized, Robert Haydon, author of *Thomas Haydon, England to Virginia, 1657*, and Nakia Lorice Long, a descendent of Ezekiel Tapscott, contributed exceedingly valuable information. Finally, I would like to thank Carolyn Jett, author of *Lancaster County Virginia, Where the River Meets the Bay*, who read much of the manuscript before publication and saved me from innumerable blunders. Carolyn made numerous suggestions, including the addition of genealogical charts, which added greatly to this book.

Transcriptions of major documents, or portions thereof, are placed in appendices, text, or endnotes. Most, but by no means all, courtroom records cited were examined as originals or photocopies, one major exception being references citing Ruth and Sam Sparacio of The Antient Press. To the extent practicable, all direct quotations maintain the spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar of the original (see Appendices, p.161). Attempts, probably to a fault, have been made to provide data sources, reflecting my distaste for undocumented “facts” and figures. Federal census references are given directly in the text, rather than in the endnotes, as this is usually sufficient to find the source and page numbers in early censuses are often meaningless. To facilitate endnote use, “op. cit.” has been avoided and abbreviations are few.

Portions abstracted from this book have been published in the *Bulletin of the Northumberland County Historical Society*, Vol. 42, 2005, pp. 3-17. Since that publication, however, a more meticulous transcription of a court document shows that Henry Tapscott arrived in the New World in January 1699/1700 rather than January 1696/1697 as accepted in the past. This is discussed in the present book.

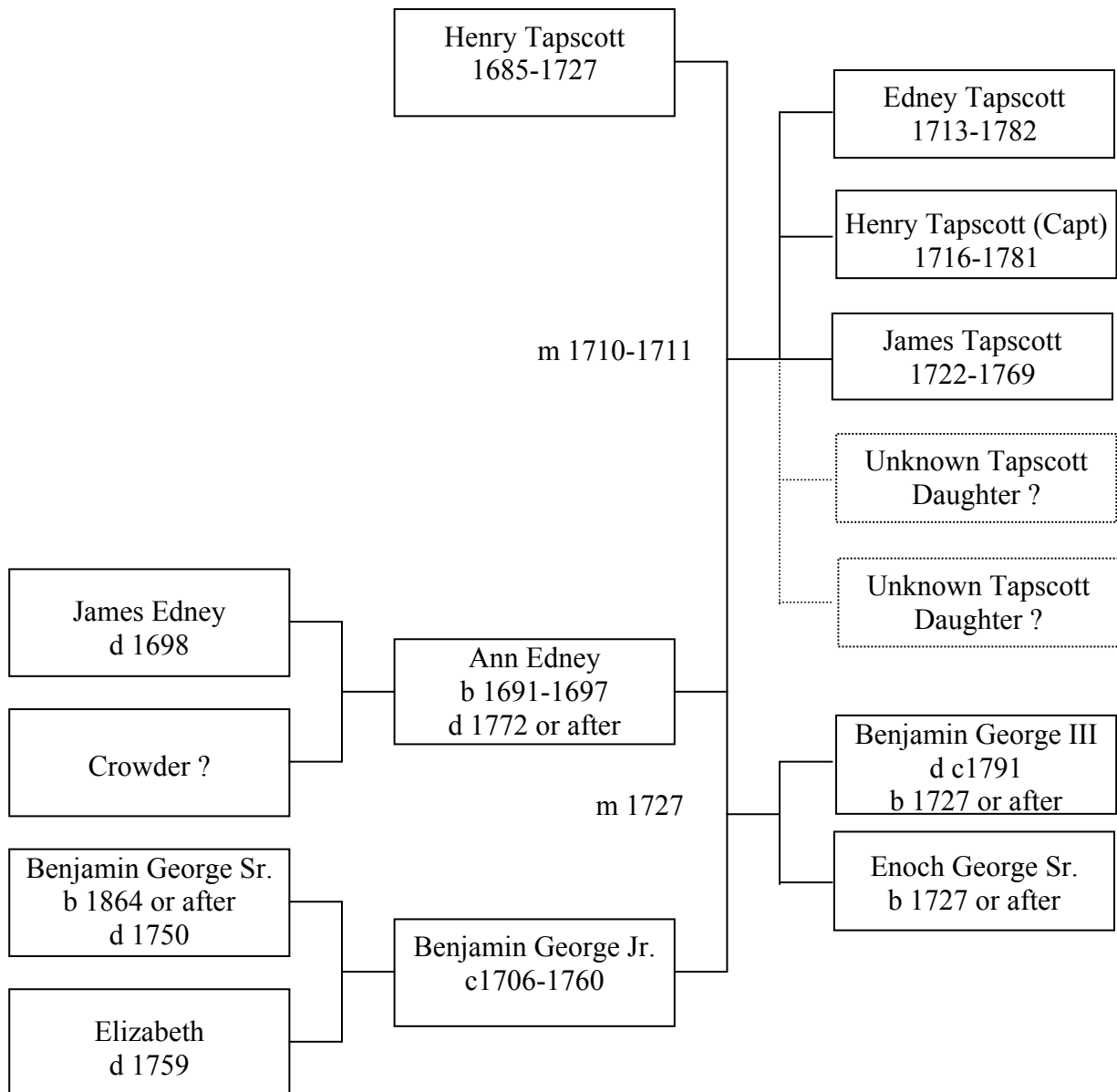
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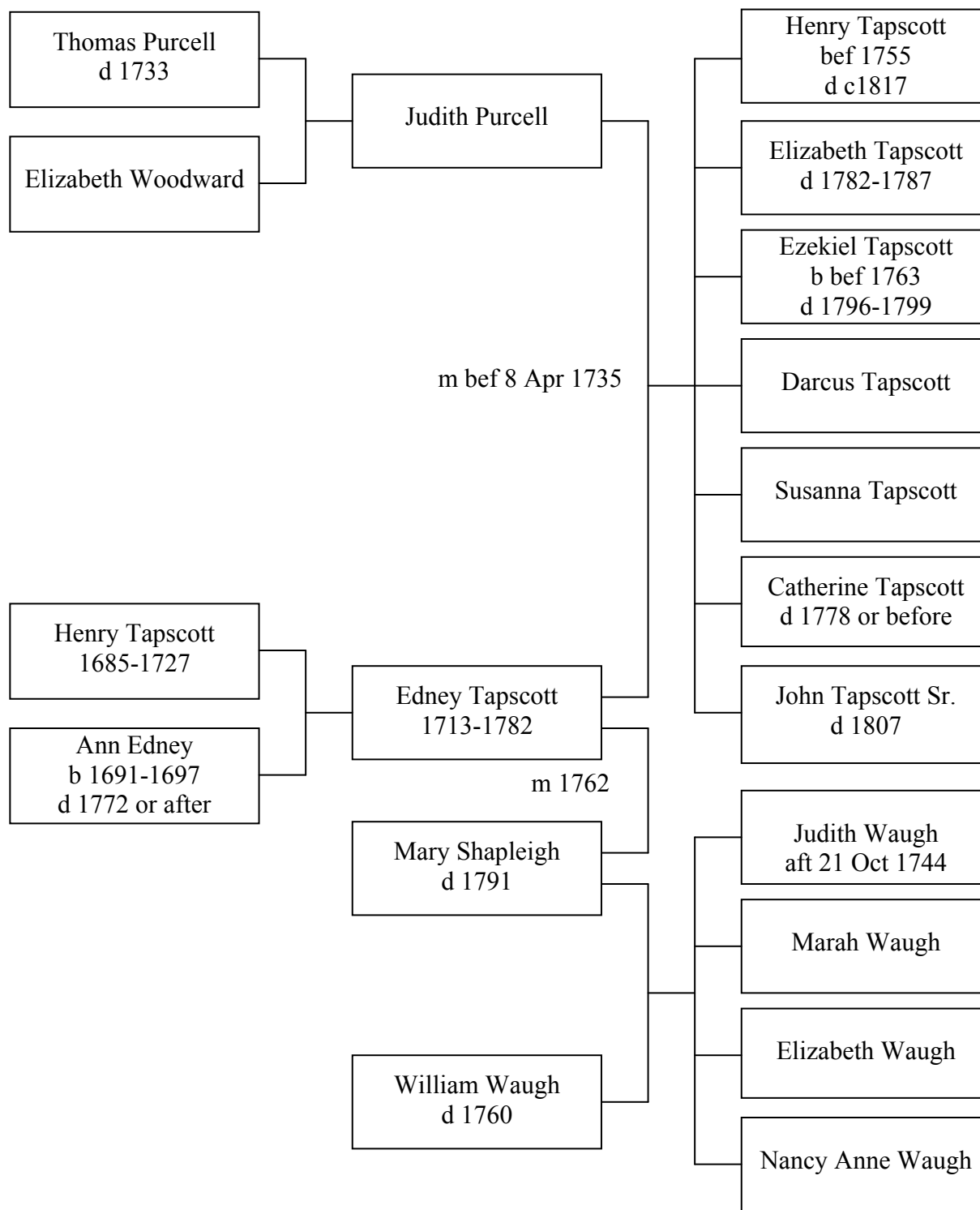
Inn at Levelfields, between Kilmarnock and Lancaster in Virginia dating from the 1850s.

Family Trees

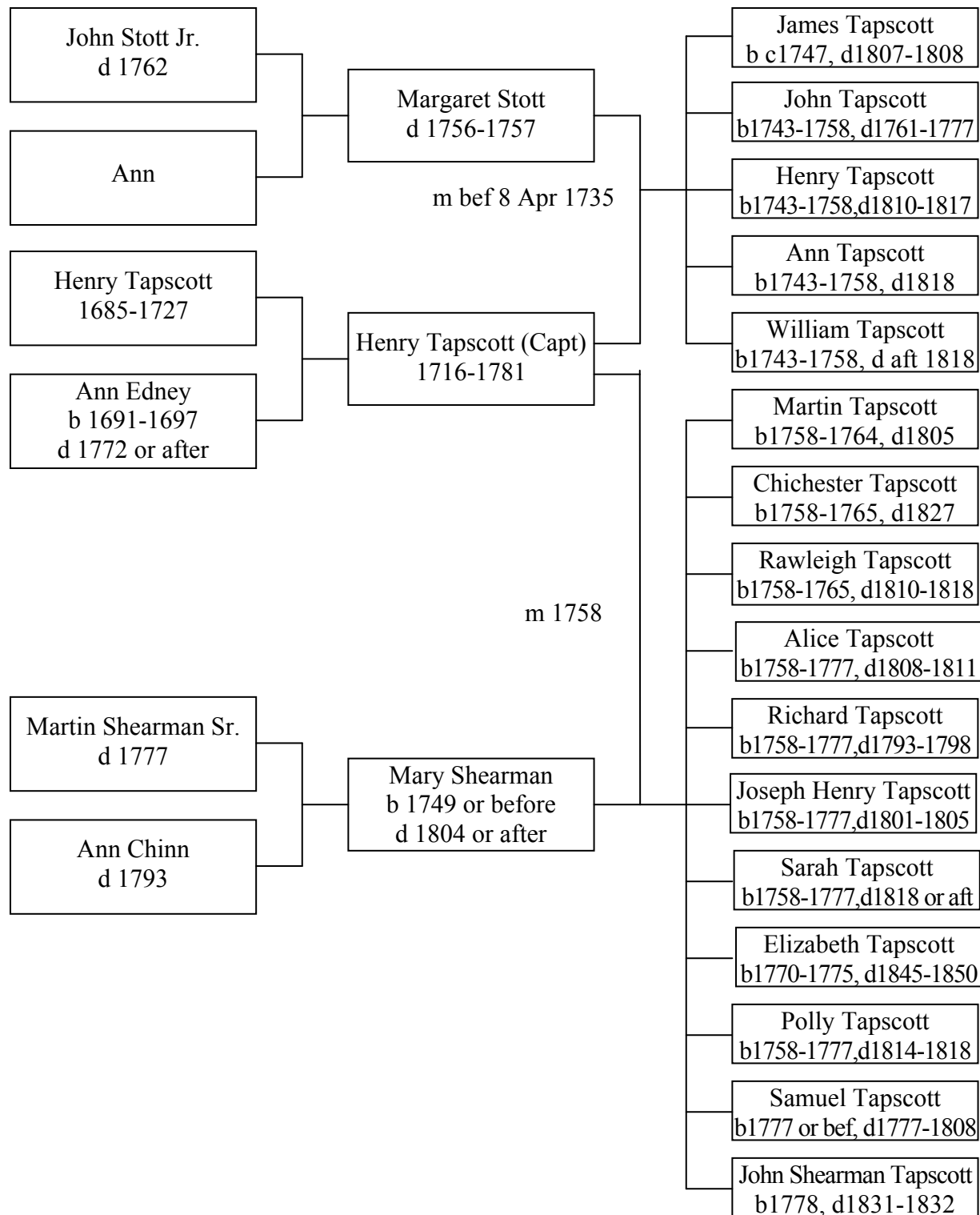
Ann Edney's Families



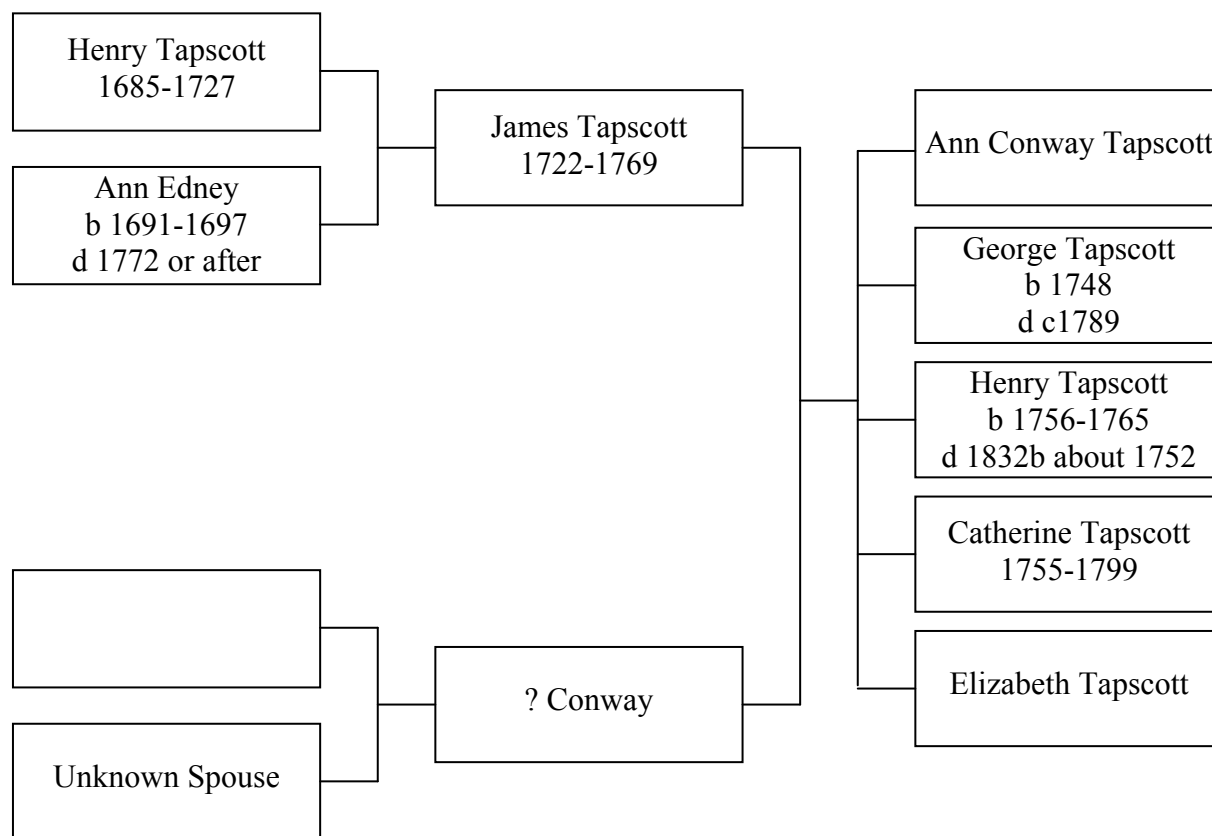
Edney Tapscott Family



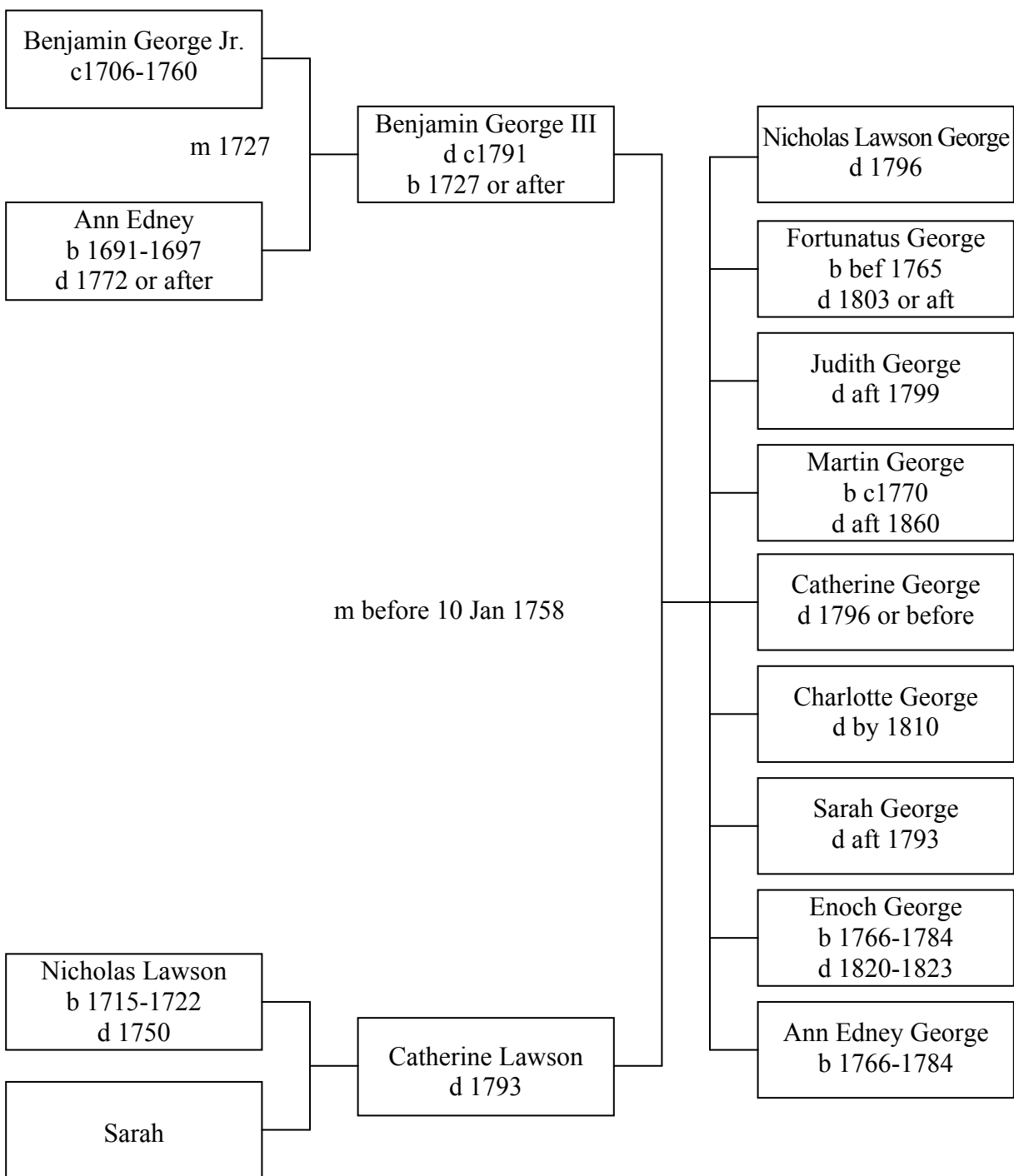
Capt. Henry Tapscott Family



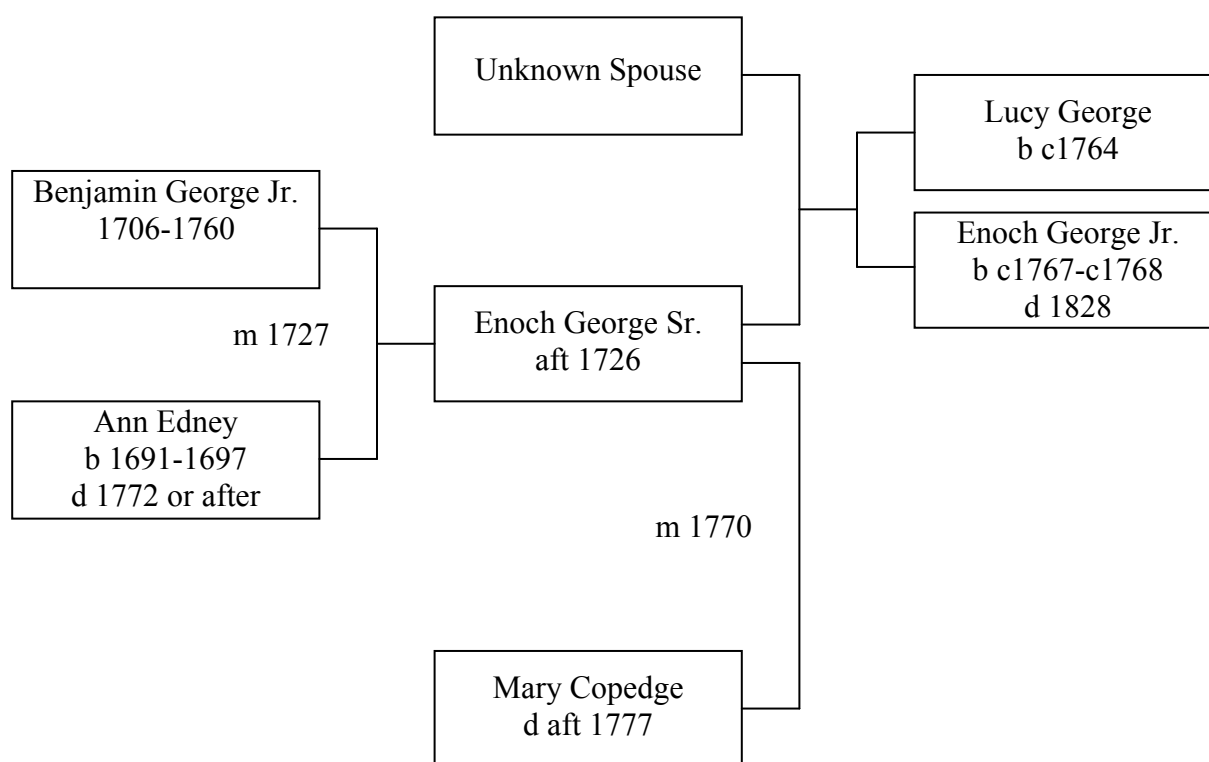
James Tapscott Family



Benjamin George (III) Family



Enoch George Sr. Family

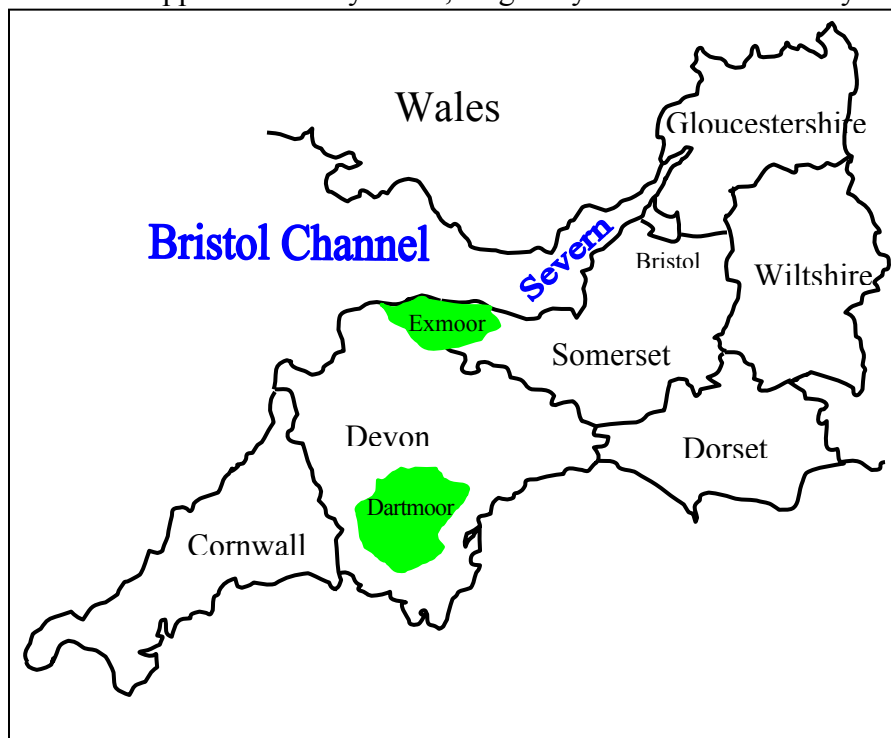


Beginnings

Names

The Tapscott name and its variations first appear in the middle 1500s in Southwest England, the “West Country,” containing the counties of Somerset, Devon, Dorset, Wiltshire, and Cornwall, and the City and County of Bristol.¹ The name emerged shortly after 1538, when Thomas Cromwell, the Vicar General under Henry VIII, decreed that Anglican clergy should record in a book all christenings, marriages, and burials for the preceding week after each Sunday service in the presence of the churchwardens.² Before that time, the very few records made were written on loose sheets, which were almost always lost.

Tracing the derivation of a name is often unprofitable; conclusions are seldom more than guesswork. But, the guesswork can be entertaining, and results, illuminating. The second syllable of “Tapscott” almost certainly comes from Old English (OE) “cott” (related to Old Norse “kot”) meaning a small hut. From this origin come the words “cottage” and “cot.” Early English place names with the suffix “cott” were attached to humble settlements, often individual small farmsteads, and were frequently compounded with a personal name, probably that of an early tenant.³ “Tapp” is a county name, originally found almost solely in Devon and Somerset.⁴ The



England's West Country.

standard singular OE possessive ending was usually “s” or “es” (no apostrophe).⁵ Eventually the location of Tapp’s cottage or farmstead (“Tapps cott”) would become known as “Tappscott,” and names such as “William of Tappscott” would become “William Tappscott,” an early variant.

Today, no place name in the Somerset/Devon area remotely resembles the name “Tappscott,” other than Tippacott (near Lynton at the far west side of Exmoor) and Tascott, both in Devon.

The latter neighborhood, which is occasionally listed with North Petherwin near the Cornwall border, is apparently named after a local family rather than the converse. Any “Tappscott” settlement has disappeared in the mists of time. “Tapps,” a manor of Baldwin de Brionne in Devon, is listed in the Domesday Book, compiled in 1086, and a cottage, farmstead, or small settlement associated with this manor could have become a place name source for “Tapscott,” though there is no evidence of this.

Many West Country names have derivations similar to that described here—“Nethercot” (lower cottage/farm, from OE “nether”), “Westcott” (west), “Estcott” (or “Estcot,” east), “Prescott” (priest, from OE “prēost”), “Woolcott” (or “Wolcott,” stream, from Middle English “wolle”), and “Chilcott” (from the OE name “Ceola”). A common name source, however, does not necessarily mean a common bloodline. Unconnected persons may have been associated with a settlement, farm, or cottage known as “Tappscott,” and more than one location may have had this designation. Nevertheless, the Tapscott name arose in a limited area, for relatively few individuals, who may have been related.

The Earliest Tapscotts

It is sometimes claimed that the Tapscotts and their name are Welsh, and it is true that if one travels by boat across the Bay of Bristol from Minehead or from the coast near Stogumber, both in Somerset, one strikes the Welsh town of Barry, nowadays the home of many Tapscotts. Though a Celtic relationship would add romance to the line, the Tapscotts are not Welsh (nor Irish, nor despite the name, Scotch). They have no defining history in Wales, or Ireland, or Scotland. They wore no Welsh *ysgrepan*, no Irish tunic, no Scottish tartan. The Tapscotts

